Characteristics of The Islamic Hijab for Muslim Women

English Translation

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

All praise is due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon the Messenger of Allah, and upon his family, his companions, and those who follow him.

To proceed:

The Muslim woman has been granted a lofty status in Islam, and the noble Sharia has given her great care to preserve her chastity. Allah has made hijab obligatory upon her with respect to non-mahram men, in order to protect her honor from harm. He has also placed conditions for this hijab, which must all be met for it to be considered valid Islamically. If any condition is not fulfilled, then the hijab is not considered legislatively valid and is not pleasing to Allah, the Most High.

So what are the conditions of the Muslim woman's hijab?

The conditions (qualities) of proper Islamic hijab, as explained by the scholars, are eight:

First: It must be thick and not see-through, such that it does not reveal what is underneath it.

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "There are two types of the people of Hell whom I have not yet seen: people with whips like the tails of cattle with which they strike people, and women who are clothed yet naked, inclined and leaning away. Their heads are like the humps of tilted camels. They will not enter Paradise nor find its scent, although its scent is found from such-and-such a distance..."
[Reported by Muslim]

Al-Nawawi said: this hadith is among the miracles of prophethood, as these two groups have indeed appeared–and they exist today. The hadith condemns these categories. The meaning of "clothed yet naked" is that they cover part of their body while exposing part of it, or that they wear thin (see-through) clothing.

Second: It must be loose and not tight-fitting (i.e., not form-fitting):

It is narrated from Usāmah ibn Zayd (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) gave me a thick Coptic garment as a gift from what Diḥyah al-Kalbī had given him. I made my wife wear it, so the Messenger of Allah said to me: "Why do you not wear the Coptic garment?" I said: O Messenger of Allah, I have clothed my wife with it. He said: "Order her to wear something underneath it, for I fear it may describe the size of her bones." [Reported by Ahmad; graded ḥasan by al-Arna'ūṭ]

The "Coptic garment" refers to a type of clothing attributed to the Copts of Egypt, and "ghilālah" refers to an undergarment worn beneath clothing.

Al-Shawkānī said: "The hadith indicates that it is obligatory for a woman to cover her body with clothing that does not describe it; and this is a condition of covering the ʿawrah." [Nayl al-Awṭār]

Third: It must cover the entire body, including the face and hands:

Allah, the Exalted, says:
“O Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks over themselves. That is more suitable so that they may be known and not harmed. And Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” [Al-Aḥzāb: 59]

In this verse, Allah commands His Prophet (peace be upon him) to instruct women in general–beginning with his wives and daughters due to their honor and because they are more deserving than others–to draw their outer garments over themselves from above their heads. The “jilbāb” is what is worn over clothing, such as a cloak, wrap, or veil and the like. [Tafsir Ibn Kathir; Tafsir al-Sa‘di]

Fourth: It must not be a garment of fame (libās al-shuhrah): The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said:
"Whoever wears a garment of fame in this world, Allah will clothe him in a garment of humiliation on the Day of Resurrection, then set it ablaze with fire."
[Reported by Abu Dawud and others; al-Mundhiri graded it hasan]

What is meant by "garment of fame" is clothing that causes astonishment and disapproval among people—in other words, clothing that exposes its wearer to notoriety and public attention because of its unusual color, design, or tailoring. The definition of a "garment of fame" differs from time to time and place to place: a garment may be considered attention seeking in one era but not in another, and it may be considered so in one country but not in another, depending on local custom.

Fifth: It must not resemble the clothing of disbelieving women: One of the most important foundations of the religion is differentiation from the disbelievers and polytheists. This principle is firmly established in the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah.

For example, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said to Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As (may Allah be pleased with him) when he saw him wearing two garments dyed with safflower:

"Indeed, these are from the clothing of the disbelievers, so do not wear them." [Reported by Muslim]

Among the clothing of disbelieving women today is what Christian, Jewish, secular, and pagan women wear...

Sixth: It must not resemble men's clothing: On the authority of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him), he said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) cursed the man who wears women's clothing, and the woman who wears men's clothing. [Reported by Abu Dawud and others; authenticated by al-Shawkani and al-Hakim, and al-Dhahabi agreed]

And the Prophet (peace be upon him) also said:

"He is not one of us who imitates men among women, or imitates women among men." [Reported by Ahmad; authenticated by al-Arna'ut]

Seventh: It must not be a garment of adornment that draws attention: Allah the Exalted says: {“And not to display their adornment…”} [An-Nur: 31], and He says:
{“And do not display yourselves as in the former days of ignorance”} [Al-Ahzab: 33].

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: “Three people about whom you should not ask: a man who separated from the Jama'ah and disobeyed his ruler and died disobedient; a runaway slave who died; and a woman whose husband was absent after he had sufficed her worldly needs, yet she adorned herself after him–do not ask about them.”
[Reported by Ahmad; authenticated by al-Haythami and al-Arna’ut]

So if a woman’s “hijab” itself becomes an adornment, then it is not truly hijab, because the purpose of hijab legislation is to prevent display of adornment to non-mahram men. It is not reasonable, therefore, for the hijab itself to become a form of beautification.

Thus, a Muslim woman seeking to fulfill this condition must ensure her clothing is free of decoration and does not attract the attention of men due to its color or embellishment.

Eighth: It must not be perfumed (scented or fumigated): The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “Any woman who applies perfume and passes by people so that they can smell her fragrance is a zāniyah.” [Reported by al-Nasa’i and others; al-Tirmidhi graded it hasan sahih]

And he also said:
“If one of you goes out to the mosque, she must not approach perfume.” [Reported by Ahmad; authenticated by al-Arna’ut]

Ibn Daqiq al-‘Id said:

“This indicates the prohibition of perfume for a woman who intends to go out to the mosque, because it stirs desire in men.” [Fayd al-Qadir by al-Munawi]

Sister in Islam: These are the characteristics of your Islamic hijab. It is forbidden for you to violate any of them in front of non-mahram men–meaning all men who are not your mahrams.

Your mahrams, from whom there is no obligation of hijab, are those whom Allah the Exalted mentioned in Surah An-Nur (31), where He says:

{"And not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or male attendants lacking desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women."}

Thus, those who are not your mahrams include your husband's brother, your paternal cousin, your maternal cousin, and other relatives. So beware of uncovering yourself in front of them.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

“Beware of entering upon women.” A man said: “O Messenger of Allah, what about the in-law (al-ḥamw)?” He said: “The in-law is death.” [Agreed upon]

Imam al-Nawawi said:
Al-aḥmā’ (plural of ḥamw) are the relatives of the husband. The Prophet’s description of them as “death” means that danger is more likely in their case because closeness and seclusion with a woman is easier for them than for a stranger, and therefore temptation is more expected, unlike with a non-relative. [Sharh al-Nawawi ‘ala Muslim]

O Allah, protect Muslim women and grant them modesty and chastity.

And may Allah send blessings upon our Prophet Muhammad and upon his family and companions.